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Newport can exploit advantages to thrive

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Working in England, I learned that the British phrase “whinging” (pronounced “windjing”) meant “complaining.” However, I realized there is often a fundamental difference between complaining and whinging: the action’s results.

Successful whinging involves complaining/recognizing a problem and asking the key question, “What if we did X to solve the problem?” With that transformative moment — the effort to adapt to changing circumstances — whinging moves towards opportunistic resiliency. We get there by listening to and interacting with others and their “whinging what ifs.” Then, most importantly, we shed egos to identify synergistic opportunities to combine and build on those individual “whinging what ifs” for a productive solution. Yankee ingenuity transforming resiliency into opportunity.

Newporters, their Aquidneck Island neighbors and Rhode Islanders are experts at creating opportunistic resiliency from the whinging process. In the natural environment, economic and social spheres, we historically have devised solutions to changing circumstances, creating opportunities by adapting. This skill still is very much alive but often unrecognized.

To capitalize on our opportunistic resiliency, we must appreciate our unique advantages such as location and size.

Aquidneck Island sits approximately in the middle of the northern half of one of the most vibrant global megalopolises: the Boston-Washington corridor. Moreover, it is in the center of two dynamic and related innovation spheres: the cutting-edge underwater defense training, technology and work found at Naval Station Newport, the Naval War College and Naval Undersea Warfare Center Newport; and the most globally advanced oceanographic technology research, development and application found at the University of Rhode Island’s Graduate School of Oceanography and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Those are important resources.

Size is another unique advantage. Rhode Island communities’ ready access to their elected officials — local, state and federal — is astonishing. With such access comes a level of attention from the officials and staff that is the envy of other states’ economic development groups.

Additionally, our small size allows for strong collaboration with other strategic partners, such as the Newport County Chamber of Commerce, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association and Social Enterprise Greenhouse.

Using these advantages, we are developing the building blocks to ensure long-term economic, physical, educational, cultural and social opportunistic resiliency, including:

- The potential reuse of Newport’s Sheffield School as a technology incubator/accelerator with a focus on synergies among the technologies related to resiliency, defense, oceanographic, environmental and digital areas.
- The use of the incubator/accelerator as a part of a larger Innovation Hub for Newport and Aquidneck that will be a planned research and development, technology commercialization transfer and service center project to enlarge the island’s participation in the resiliency, ocean, environmental, defense (underwater and cyber security) and digital industries, their support sub-sectors, and ancillary financial, commercial and conference/hospitality/ retail support services.

- Attempts to become recognized globally as a center of resiliency by submitting an Aquidneck regional application to the globally competitive 100 Resilient Cities Challenge of the Rockefeller Foundation.
- The building of economic resiliency through the enhancement of the 21st century critical infrastructure: broadband access. The island communities have a very active IT Working Advisory Group working on how the island can foster this key 21st century infrastructure.
- The fostering of environmental resiliency by Newport, with financial support from the Van Beuren Charitable Foundation, through its ongoing participation in the nationally benchmarked sea level rise and storm surge work being done at the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council and URI's Coastal Resource Center related to mitigation and adaptation strategies, as well as public outreach and education. In addition, Newport is submitting an application to the National Flood Insurance Program's FEMA Community Rating System.

The skill of "successful whinging" is alive, well and continually being used in Newport and on Aquidneck to realize opportunistic resiliency.

We welcome all whingers to use their skill in Newport and Aquidneck Island.

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